

Graniteville Woods Land Purchase Study Committee
Sept 22, 2006 7:30 am Police Chief Meeting Room.

Attending: Diane Holmes, Margaret Wheeler, Andrea Peraner-Sweet for Fred Palmer, Judith Culver, Phil McKinley, and Asst Town Manager Norman Khumalo, Finance Director Susanne Marchand, Fire Chief Rich Rochon.

Absent: Bob Jefferies

Call to order at 7:30 am. Chair Holmes distributed an agenda.

Committee unanimously approved the 9/15/06 minutes. Culver noted that she will copy the Board of Selectmen and Town Clerk on the approved minutes.

Holmes noted that she is scheduled to give a GW Committee progress report at the 9/26 Selectmen meeting.

Reserve Fund transfer

Holmes and Culver updated members on the 9/21 Finance Committee meeting where a lengthy discussion was held with the members regarding the information the GW Committee is gathering and the need for the requested appraisal of the GW parcels. The Finance Committee unanimously approved a transfer of \$8500 from the Reserve Fund to finance an appraisal by Avery needed to assist in determining the financial impacts a potential purchase could have on Westford. Members recognized that an appraised value of the GW parcels will not be ready for STM.

School Enrollment impact

Holmes has also asked School Supt. Olsen to rework the school impact numbers that he had done for the original LIP project that contained several different types of housing (single family dwellings, townhouses, deed restricted, and apartments). He is going to be doing an impact analysis on the changed plan for GW, namely 248 townhouse units, as it is felt that taking away the variety of housing will change the numbers of students coming out of GW. She noted that Olsen's other analysis of school costs for Laurel Woods does not include overhead costs (admin, maintenance, etc) which the state's Per Pupil costs include. Olsen will forward this to Holmes within a week.

Emanouil status

Khumalo reported that GW developer Emanouil has submitted a 248 unit sub-division proposal for appraisal to the State. Emanouil has requested that the remaining parcels in his original proposal of 152 acres also be appraised by the state.

Separately, Emanouil is submitting a plan for 16 conventional residences on his adjoining plot northwest of Cowdry Hill Road, to the Westford Planning Board.

Khumalo has also discussed with Larry Koff, whose firm produced the Lauren Hill analysis, the possibility of conducting a similar analysis of the GW proposal for \$3000. Peraner-Sweet recommended that this Committee should seek direction from the Selectmen before authorizing more spending.

Public Safety Impact of GW

Fire Chief Rochon, using a large map, identified the three open stations in town, and the districts/areas each covers. The GW development is in the Rogers station area, an unmanned station. This area is already impacted by lengthy call response times; any new development worsens fire/ambulance service. Rochon has historic measurements of the type and number of calls each road in Town produced. Committee asked him to provide historic call data for Pilgrim Village, Blanchard Farms, and Hildreth Hill, which are comparable to the GW proposal in housing type. Rochon will contact Holmes when this is complete.

Chief Rochon summarized the public safety situation in the Rogers station area as at a tipping point into failure; manned staffing for Rogers station requires 8 firefighters/EMTs and was cut from the FY07 budget. Clearly, a fully occupied GW development will negatively impact public safety as it is now structured for this sector.

Khumalo described an existing standard is that any new development should not make a situation worse; the developer has a responsibility to keep the situation at least level. In some situations, developers have assisted with staffing phase-ins for a few years.

Debt Ceiling and Bonding Capacity

Susanne Marchand explained that a town's debt ceiling is calculated as 5% of a town's equalized valuation of \$2.5 billion and that \$25 million remains before Westford's ceiling is reached.

FY07 will find Westford's operational spending just above minimum recommended reserves; however FY08 and forward are projected to be below minimum recommended reserves as filling the gap between revenues and expenditures continues to be a struggle for the Town, with a potential to negatively affect our AA3 bond rating.

Outstanding debt – exempt and non-exempt – is currently decreasing slightly, but annual payments for the Academy expansion, three new schools, and the highway garage will continue until 2020, 2023, and 2024. Any non-exempted debt exacerbates the goal to remain at the minimum recommended reserve.

McKinley offered that the Petition Article for STM will likely be amended to a debt exempted bonding or that the article may be discussed at the same time as the Town's article for GW purchase.

He is currently gathering information on the amount of protected town-owned or private land in various MA towns to provide a comparison to Westford's efforts.

Other Business.

Peraner-Sweet reported that Palmer will return for the next meeting; Culver will be absent next meeting. Khumalo will post meetings for Sept 29, Oct 6 and Oct 13.

Culver will incorporate today's topics and information into her Impact Chart. Holmes distributed a summary of notes she will use for the 9/26 Selectmen meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 9:00 am

Graniteville Woods Land Purchase Study Committee

Sept 15, 2006

Attending: Diane Holmes, Margaret Wheeler, Andrea Peraner-Sweet for Fred Palmer, Judith Culver, Phil McKinley, and Asst Town Manager Norman Khumalo.
Absent: Bob Jefferies

On a motion by Culver, seconded by Wheeler, Diane Holmes was elected chair by majority of the members present. Culver agreed to take minutes

Khumalo reported that Avery's \$8,500 proposal for an appraisal includes all of the area in the smaller \$5,000 proposal. Timing for Town Meeting completion will be very tight. The necessary Finance Committee Reserve Fund Transfer is scheduled for 9/21 at 7:00 pm.

He also reported that the 57 acres which is currently at the start of the state's 40B process will have development on 31 acres only, with the remaining 26 acres as open space.

In discussing how to value a 40B 200+ units townhouse development, members agreed that the existing Keyes Corner and proposed Laurel Hill provide comparable information. The lengthy Fiscal Impact Analysis of Woodlands at Laurel Hill was distributed by Holmes to the committee. Members were asked to align this, if possible, with Supt. Olsen's school impact report.

Members agreed to use 240 units, with 60 as affordable, in the models which we will work up for the Selectmen. Culver will review the budget impact to the Fire/Public Safety departments of this development with Chief Rochon before next meeting

We agreed that the option to purchase the land and then to erect affordable housing brings development costs and liabilities to the Town. In this scenario, the Town must seek a development partner, as with the Stoney Brook complex. Norman will collect some information on this project.

Culver will review with Finance Director Marchand the extent of Westford's remaining bonding capacity and the total outstanding debt.

Holmes suggested that Culver's chart – 'Impact to Town', which categorizes the types of costs and revenues to expect under three scenarios - 1) No Town Purchase, development goes ahead, 2) Town purchase of all, no development, 3) Town Purchase and Affordable Housing developed by Town. - is a useful way to collect the data needed to provide to the Selectmen and Town Meeting. Committee members are asked to review all of the data and modify the chart as needed before our next meeting – 9/22/06.

Members unanimously agreed that our charge is to provide information to Town Meeting and the Selectmen, and not to recommend a particular course of action.